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UNCLAS HARARE 001355

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/S, AF/PD

NSC FOR JENDAYI FRAZER

LONDON FOR GURNEY

PARIS FOR NEARY

NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT PUULS PLUG ON SEMI-INDEPENDENT TV  
BROADCASTER

1. The government of Robert Mugabe refused to re-new the broadcast license of semi-independent television broadcaster "Joy TV" and the station ceased operations on May 31. The following report from the Zimbabwe office of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) offers an accurate summary of the sad case of Joy TV.

2. Begin Text:

CURTAIN COMES DOWN ON JOY TV

Zimbabwe's privately owned broadcasting station, Joy TV, started in July 1998, closed down on 31 May 2002, bringing down the curtain on Zimbabwe's botched experiment with broadcasting diversity and carrying the same dream down with it.

Joy TV closed down after a lease agreement it had with the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) was canceled on the grounds that Joy TV had violated the Broadcasting Services Act that was enacted in 2001. Joy TV was leasing ZBC's second station, generally known as TV 2.

The closure of Joy TV leaves the state-controlled ZBC as the sole broadcasting voice in Zimbabwe. Although the Broadcasting Services Act was enacted in 2001, purportedly to regulate the entry of other players into the industry, no private station has been licensed to date. The ZBC therefore maintains its "monopoly".

The short but eventful life of Joy TV faced stern challenges, especially direct interference from the government. This manifested itself in a direct order for the station to drop the BBC news bulletin it broadcast everyday. Joy TV was also never allowed to produce local news except musicals and apolitical documentaries. The station's reliance on the ZBC for transmission was a contributing factor to its demise. The government could switch it off at any time, effectively preventing Joy TV from producing any programming that challenged the status quo.

The closure of Joy TV underscores the need to license other players to enter the broadcasting industry. MISA-Zimbabwe believes the Broadcasting Act needs major amendments if private players are to survive in the industry.

The government has largely ignored the calls to amend the Act, which makes it virtually impossible for private players to enter the industry. Among the many blemishes in the Act are the prohibition on foreign investment in the broadcasting industry and the requirement that broadcasters adhere to a strictly defined programme content.

End text.

SULLIVAN